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Weblogging: A Technological Framework Mediated by the Self

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Abstract

This article examines the way in which self-consciousness and audience each concur to self-exposure in individuals who use weblogs. Through separately controlling some of the means that probably influence individuals interaction by computer-mediated communication, this article explores the measure to which several variables contribute to self-exposure put up in virtual/online contexts. Therefore, the study tackles these variables allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the simultaneous role each variable plays in psychological outcomes such as the self-exposure of individuals using new technologies. We also sought to show the psychological meanings of online self-expression.

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1. Introduction

The fast occurrence of internet-based personal weblogs (“blogs”) throws back particular technological innovations and new online practices with large relationship to the self. Weblogs emerge on personal websites and are typically and regularly improved by their author. Blog posts include a wide range of topics from personal to more non-private ones such as star stories, political views, news, and other information. According to Barrett, weblog is “a small web site, usually maintained by one person that is updated on a regular basis and has a high concentration of repeat visitors” (Barrett, 2002, p. 89). Literally, the weblog means to “log information found on the Web.”

At its simplest, a weblog is an online page containing a collection of links and associated textual commentaries or annotations, where the “posts” step out in reverse chronological order such that the most recent post appears at the top page of the blog to which new entries (links & text) are added on a frequent basis.

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In the past few years, however, there's been a decline in popularity among the people using blogging for online self-expression, while new self-exposure social networking such as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Flickr or Twitter are constantly growing. A detailed analysis of this decline shows that while the use of blog by young adults is fast declining its use among older ones (over 30 years) is rising. This fact is due to the broadening tool-sets of more recent trends in online self-exposure on social networking sites such as Facebook. Nowadays, for example, Facebook enables individuals more freedom to express themselves online without text limitations using the "notes" tool.

As Petru Iluț suggests in his book *Sinele și cunoașterea lui*, the most important consequences of these changes are the multiple and contextual emphasis on identity, self detaching from the rigid social structures and statuses and the nurturing of the intimate and internal features. On one hand, this kind of private self-consciousness leads to attending one's own thoughts and feelings (e.g., the hidden nature of the self, or 'the secret self'/ the 'undisclosed self') that are often made transparent on weblogs. On the other hand, the public self-consciousness is the tendency to reach the self as others view it (e.g., the genuine feature of the self).

In weblogging the contexts and social groups mix online. Any message can be seen by anyone. When we communicate, we usually have in mind a particular audience to which the message is for. Therefore, a message intended for a kind of audience can be seen and interpreted differently, or negatively by another type of audience. When communicating online, we must make an extra effort to think to other unintended audiences, and how the message might look in their eyes. Online communication requires a higher level of effort and self-confidence than offline communication. Unfortunately, the online culture is a culture of speed, and it takes more effort to resist pressure to press the Send / Post before we having thought for a second.

The online environment provides an opportunity to build the self strategically. We have much more control over the way we present ourselves, than in offline communication. We can make careful selections and we can build a positive and complex identity. A negative aspect is that we have no control over the online information about us. Information can survive long after we (think) we destroyed it, or, better said "Google never forgets."

Today, there is an obvious mix between everything that is material and virtual, a so curdled mixture that we can hardly distinguish between these two concepts, real and virtual. Although, in fact, they are totally opposed, the margin between real and virtual is becoming increasingly thin. Nicholas Negroponte asserts in his work *Being Digital*: "We live in a world that tends to become digital" (Negroponte, 1996, p.163). We live in a world where almost everything can be experienced through a simulated version of virtual reality: we shop online, pay our bills online, work online, communicate online, travel on-line etc. In these circumstances, we can talk about a booming culture of virtual reality.

If we accept the idea that post-postmodern self assumes a multiple/multimodal identity, then we can assert that identity today is a free choice, a dramatic representation of the self, in which each is able to self-expose in a variety of roles, images and activities. In other words, identity is an extension of free choice and of a multiple identity that accepts the condition of a fast and intense change of society. In this way, the other becomes a part of the identity and therefore the identity of an individual depends on recognition by the public.

As the title of this article suggests, the technological perfection seduces, says Baudrillard in one of his memorable books, *Seduction*. Based on people's fascination with technology and communicational speed, blogs are an expression of the need to focus on exposing a new hybrid self. The active posting of conflicting or cooperative personal approaches reflects the multiple-voiced features of the self. Thus, blogs become evident examples of Hermans' model of the multi-voiced networked self's dynamic meeting with social and cultural others.

2. Hypotheses

Individuals develop new meanings of personal identity through the online character (online disinhibition effect). Further, I will describe weblogs as places where individuals can acquire multiple identities in unprecedented ways and cause changes in the conventional notion of identity. Identities are thus negotiated, reproduced and indexed in a variety of new types of online interactions. The results were that these identities are perceived and described by users as at least as real as those in the offline reality. To make a comparison between the two types of identities (online/offline), so as to say that virtual identity is a natural continuation of nowadays identity (understood in the terms in which we defined it at the beginning of the paper) we should note if this identity is indeed real. To be real it

must follow the pattern of identity in the physical world. To do this the first hypothesis is to assume that the virtual identity is formed and negotiated in the same way that real life identity is constructed in the offline world. In this respect, the symbolic interactionism and technological framework is crucial to understand the process of creating both offline and the virtual identity. For example, in some contexts, people using online identities may also meet offline, this fact leading to a new form of blended identity. Both psychology and communications have found their relative fields appealed by fundamental theoretical and practical developments in terms of the nature of the self and forms of public interchange. Moreover, highly neurotic individuals may use weblogging to reduce states of self-alienation and develop perceptions of new social cohesion. Relating the self to a “society of multiple minds” or to “moving positions” (Hermans, 2001, p.156) the second hypothesis is that, by using cyberspace, bloggers offer the public a kind of self-intimacy which would not be possible in person thus creating a model of moving positions within the self even by changing identities for multiple blogs under one profile.

To sustain this, cyberspace does not only offer “new social spaces where identity can be (re)negotiated, but that a significant reason many go online is to experience new forms of social life” (Williams, 2006, p.179). Once absorbed by the virtual world people begin to build online identities without having fear of the repercussions that could arise in the offline life. Through this role play, the users adopt positions that express certain parts of one’s self that were forced for some reasons to suppress it in cyberspace.

Thus, we will be acting on two basic assumptions: first, weblogs allow authors or “bloggers” to commit oneself to varying online practices of self-exposure and, secondly that weblogs develop as a format of online self-expression.

3. Method

For this research data were provided from the online presentation of personal weblogs. We used Blog hosting Services Review 2014 (<http://blog-services-review.toptenreviews.com/>) to employ a sample of 10 best blogs for the purposes of undertaking an analysis of weblogs in terms of variables that contribute to self-exposure put up in virtual/online contexts.

Weblogs’ authors often allow readers’ comments by e-mail or even SMS and MMS mobile messages. Some of them are explicit or enjoyable (receive positive feedback), whereas others are provocative (receive negative feedback). How often do bloggers get these comments? To what extent does such feedback influence bloggers? It seems obvious that bloggers value weblogs keeping to the extent that they receive positive feedback while not receiving negative feedback. Readers’ responses show the real existence of a readership. Such responses control the degree of satisfaction that a weblog offers, and further the changing of the self that finally causes one’s intention to keeping a weblog (Fig. 1). By a close examination of this model, we sought to show the psychological processes that plead for keeping a blog.

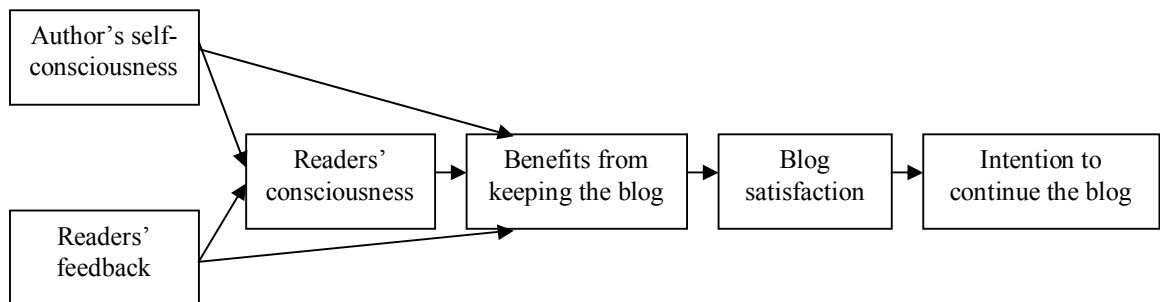


Fig. 1. Hypothetical causative model for keeping the weblog

4. Results

Authors often expose to the readers their biographical sketch through a brief performance of their ordinary life history or how an important disease or accident influenced their life's story. The weblog places the author's personal interests within the precise temporal frame of the main channel. Moreover, last posts are usually archived by date in easily open sites.

Weblogs show an interest in both visual display through design tools and presentation quality or feature management as shown in Blog hosting Services Review 2014. Each weblog has a particular "look and feel" often with customized profile in terms of graphical, typographical, and formatting schemes. The resulting blog is a personal construction available as an online template to new bloggers. This application is significant to the ways in which weblog construction sites serve as an extended social world of the web where the blogger can expose/express his self in terms of photographic images for example of his/her family, friends, travel sites, etc. Sometimes, the self-expression is found in the use of a *webcam*, by which blogger's individual images are constantly posted in "real time."

Finally, bloggers introduce their readers various paths of direct interactions. Blogs generally list implies for readers to contact authors simultaneously through Instant Messaging or alternatively via email. Readers may also be asked to sign an online "guestbook," enter their email addresses in a database to receive announcements, or manifest their opinions by online voting.

The core element of the weblog is the main channel where authors regularly post and update items online. Besides having date headings to divide entries, most of the weblogs use time seals so that readers can determine when an article or comment was published or posted. Half the blogs also invite comments on individual postings by ensuring a mechanism to register and exhibit the responses in an interactive way. Thus, a sort of online conversation can be hold along with the author on particular posts while the author keeps on adding new items.

The main channel in a weblog is employed as a public space where weblog authors involve in a series of self-exposure activities. In this respect I spotted three elements which focus on the inner aspects of the self (self-portrayal list, diary-like narrative events of daily life and diary-like reflective self-colloquy), while seven elements display more external interest on the "others" (people, events, commentaries, online resources, etc.) Personal-positionings daily focus weblogs employ these elements widely.

Among the external focus elements I mention *Links with Annotations* and *Links with Commentaries*. Another website hyperlink is added with either a description of what the reader will find there or with a set of editorial comments and resources that rate the content of the link and it is common to both of them. Comments are more liable to prevail in "journalistic" and "political-ideological" weblogs. The *Aggregated Links* where authors collect a wide range of web resources dealing with the same topic and display them in a single enlarged posting. The *Research Report* generates a set of resources covering an issue under research.

These examples, I provided here, explain ways through which distinguished weblog practices exhibit significant qualities of the self. In this respect, there are various voices within the self, some of them even oppositional, which can reject any elementary endeavor to match their multiplicity into a variable synthesis.

The blogger is thus efficiently engaged in publishing a weblog displaying self-exposure strategies within the technological framework of cyberspace. Weblogs are obviously public and the posting of items on a blog becomes a social act of self-positioning which invites readers to find some aspects of that self that shaped posting an item. Unlike other media, hypertext links application in weblogs also challenges the reader to accept the author's outlook by experiencing what the author exposed by that link.

The blogger crafts and stores in and across time various positions of identity, both internal and external to the self. These evolve, shift focus, and interact with other positions in the rhythm of the author's life as daily recorded. Series of entries are reminiscences of the stream of consciousness. By using *blogs*, people outline more anonymous *identities*.

5. Discussions

The above findings offer an important hint regarding what sort of communication characterizes blogs. Bloggers can at least be divided into two types: those who value the personal exposure while maintaining a blog and those who value the feeling of having been understood by others through the blog.

To sum up, an interaction between mixed mechanisms serves to keep weblogs ‘alive’. In case of a self-oriented weblog, the author’s private self-consciousness is appointed by the personal interests acquired from keeping the weblog, and these benefits include the path that manipulates the goal to continue keeping the weblog.

Here, the extent of the readers’ consciousness is ruled by the author’s public self-consciousness. This consciousness is not benefit-related to the weblog, and it serves to control the degree of satisfaction that comes from the understanding of one’s self by others. This first path adjusts the goal to continue keeping the weblog. In the second path, the readers’ answers replace the extent of consciousness.

Considering all these facts, the self-management as part of social networking identity dominated by weblog contents generates differences in the volume of self-description based on readers’ response arising from the content, and the value of the virtual community. Thus, we attempted to reinterpret weblogs as extensive content, which can meet the authors’ needs for self-exposure (“diaristic weblog”), sharing knowledge with others, and information exchange (“informative weblog”).

As blogs offer an individual to expose his or her opinions as part of a wider discussion, bloggers often start by using pseudonyms, either on WordPress platforms or on sites like Blogster, for their own personal information protection and allow them more self-exposure freedom of expression. By using a pseudonym can allow a person to secure his/her “real” identity, but in the same time to build an online identity by using the fictional name. The online social networks like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn or Flickr allow people to maintain an online identity within an overlapping offline (undisclosed) identity within a real world context. These are often those types of identities set out to expose a particular aspect or best possible online version of themselves (their real selves).

Additionally, this research suggests that bloggers may enhance their subjective wellbeing through self-exposure in their blogs.

6. Conclusions

Based on the result of the study, the following conclusions were drawn. In examining weblogs, I concluded that the self was built by allowing time to serve as the main organizing principle for weblogs. In this light, we must acknowledge that in cyberspace identity is expressed to occur when bloggers investigate, measure, demand, broaden, or change their positions across time on those individual topics appearing within their weblogs. Weblogs allow their authors to share ongoing daily life personal narratives as no other cyberspatial form authorizes.

Within weblogs identity is understood as an ongoing process of self-construction both across time and space, one in which an author gathers an overlapping collection of needs, and opinions among the postings. Identity comprises of that many-voice stream of connected positions which are shared in cyberspace. Within the post-postmodernist technological framework, identity is a final achievement which marks the individual’s self arrival at an established destination.

To finally conclude, weblogs provide an extremely valuable technique for investigating the dynamics of the self into understanding the ‘negotiation of the self’ in recent times.

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